Use your phone to promote human rights

(© AP Images)

The information revolution unleashed by mobile technology has made it possible for nearly everyone to be what the United Nations calls a "civilian witness" to help promote human rights.

Along with apps that you can download to your phone, SMS and games are being used for human rights and conflict-resolution purposes, said Theo Dolan, director of PeaceTech Lab Africa, based in Kenya. You can even help fight human trafficking by taking pictures of your hotel room with the app TraffickCam.

"These are not just tools for the elite," Dolan said. "These are tools that can be used by anyone."

Many are already familiar with crowdsourcing apps like Ushahidi, Carto and Mapbox and how they have mapped natural disasters, epidemics and civil unrest.

Dolan offered some examples of crowdsourcing for human rights that PeaceTech Lab has helped communities develop to address their specific needs:

- To counter gender-based violence in Mumbai, India, a group of 12- and 13-year-old girls developed an app to crowdsource incidents and identify problem areas, such as bus lines where attacks were most frequent. They can also use the app to send early warning and early response messages to their wider network.
- In Iraq, journalists developed an app to track attacks on their peers not only to document the incidents but also to help determine the nature of threats to the media and the source of the attacks.
- For Kenya's upcoming elections, PeaceTech Lab is updating an SMS platform and providing training to community members to document election violence and misinformation. It will function with a core team to independently verify reported incidents and send out messaging to defuse tensions before incidents occur.

Non-Crowdsourcing Apps

Collin Sullivan, a program associate for human rights at the nonprofit organization Benetech, said today's apps can serve a wide range of human rights uses, depending on what is of concern. Do you want to prove that the photo you took is genuine? Do you want to document an event but protect the identity of some of the people involved (including yourself)? Do you need to protect your internet privacy or encrypt your data? Are you coping with low bandwidth? Sullivan said app developers have been addressing these types of concerns.

Benetech developed the software and app program Martus as a free, open-source and encrypted information management system that can be used to organize, back up and share information securely. After Martus is installed on a desktop computer, its mobile app allows users to feed it anything from photos and videos to interviews and scanned documents but preserves the privacy and identity of the users and makes backups in case a device or phone is stolen. The app also works

at low bandwidth and offline, allowing users to collect information into an encrypted package that sits on their phones until they export it through an internet connection, memory card or USB cable.

For photos, CameraV from the Guardian Project helps users verify the legitimacy of images in case they are disputed or claimed as fake. It collects all kinds of metadata for each image, going beyond the phone model, time, date and location to include information on nearby Wi-Fi networks and Bluetooth connections, the height of the camera, and other data that provide more proof of a photo's accuracy.

Guardian also developed ObscuraCam, which does the opposite by stripping out all of the metadata in an image to anonymize it and make it easy to blur faces to prevent them from being recognized by facial recognition technology.

If you are new to the field of documenting and reporting incidents, the app StoryMaker can train you on how to compile a compelling story, including how to set up a shot for an interview or develop an interesting storyline, and it offers templates and other suggestions for production value.

Some words of warning

Gathering data on human rights often carries a certain amount of risk, both to yourself and to those you are documenting. For data you are capturing with your phone, it is always important to be mindful of the need to protect identities and privacy.

"Intimidation of witnesses, of victims who are reporting, is a very real thing in lots of different places, so if you can keep the names of the people you talked to and their contact information private, that's all the better," Sullivan said.

He also said that those interested in using privacy or encryption tools like Tor, Psiphon or Signal should be aware that they risk elevating their profile with authorities, hackers or others who might be able to tell they are being used.

"There is this risk that maybe nobody is watching what you're doing now and you start using Tor or Signal, and then they start watching what you're doing. They start asking why is this guy using encryption? What does he have to hide? And then they start monitoring what he's doing," he said.

Fortunately, some of the world's most popular sites and apps like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp have been integrating security and identity protection features that make human rights reporting safer and anonymous, Sullivan said. For example, when WhatsApp added signal encryption protocol on all of its messages, "they effectively turned on encryption for about a billion people overnight," he said.

"Getting some of the major providers on board with some of the features that are supportive of human rights workers and activists not only makes it a lot easier for people to use … but the tools people are already using like WhatsApp or YouTube are becoming better for human rights defenders and activists by integrating a lot of the features we in the information security community and the human rights community have been advocating for," he said. "That's something that I think is the most encouraging trend."

Dolan said the proliferation of these kinds of tools, data and access to media through multiple channels is simply empowering.

“That’s a tired word, but in this case it’s hugely influential. And that sometimes transcends points about low internet access ratings. The more these tools are available through multiple channels the more people can do with them — and they are,” Dolan said.

But Sullivan says it is still important for human rights advocates to remember that all of these are ultimately just tools, and that technology is “at best only 50 percent of the solution.” Advocacy also requires developing an effective strategy, targeted advocacy and other factors.

“These things can help. They are definitely not the solution to all of our problems,” he said.

For additional information, here is a chart of more apps, games and other available products, courtesy of PeaceTech Lab’s Theo Dolan:

Application	**What it does**	**Who developed it**
Panic Button	A mobile app for Android that transforms a user’s smartphone into a secret alarm that can be activated rapidly in the event of an emergency, alerting fellow activists and enabling them to respond faster.	Amnesty International

Ripoti App	A mobile app that Kenyans can use to report incidents of torture and other cases of human rights violations. The app, which is available on the Google app store, enables users to take pictures, videos and audio recordings in real time or from one's gallery after which one sends it to IMLU (Independent Medico-Legal Unit).	IMLU (Independent Medico-Legal Unit), @iLabAfrica and Strathmore University-Kenya
SMS for human rights	Tanzanian citizens often cannot afford to file a human rights complaint or follow up on the status of a complaint being processed in a timely manner. The "SMS for Human Rights" project is creating a system that enables individuals to file complaints, check the status of previously filed complaints, and receive feedback through a web/mobile platform.	The Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance (CHRAGG)-Tanzania

MediCapt	A mobile application, by the Program on Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones at Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), that helps clinicians more effectively collect, document and preserve forensic medical evidence of sexual violence to support the local prosecution of these crimes.	Program on Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones DRC
Haki: Chaguo Ni Lako	The HAKI: Chaguo Ni Lako is a fun mobile phone game designed to inspire a commitment to peace and tolerance amongst young Kenyans. It encourages dialogue and contemplation about leadership, the rights and responsibilities of Kenyan citizens, and the distribution of resources. It challenges players to reflect on the choices they make and the consequences of those choices for peace in Kenya.	Afroes Kenya

Online Reporting	An online portal that Kenyans can use to report human rights abuses without having to go to the police or the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights offices	Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) Kenya
160 Girls	This stand-alone mobile app was developed to help enforce protections for girls against sexual violence. It provides all the information available on the 160girls.org website without the need for an internet connection. It also provides directions to police stations in its four pilot districts so that incidents of sexual violence can be reported quickly to the police.	The Equality Effect, Kenya
Sisi Ni Amani/Jihusishe	An SMS based platform that allows community members to report cases of violence or electoral irregularity via SMS. Messages are escalated to relevant authorities and security for early response.	Sisi Ni Amani, The Institute for Social Accountability-Kenya

Happy New Year, YALI Network!

Happy New Year, YALI Network!

The beginning of a new year is a time of great promise. It is an opportunity to consider who we want to be in the year ahead, and what kind of mark we want to leave on the world. Recently, over email and Facebook, we have been engaged in a conversation about the future of the YALI Network. As Macon Phillips noted, the future of the Network is what each of you — working individually and together — makes of it. At this time of renewal, we hope each of you will reflect on what the YALI Network means to YOU, and think about how YOU will leave your mark.

Here are some of the comments you shared about how you are making a difference and drawing inspiration from the YALI Network!

I started an international campaign on climate change because of the courses I got through YALI… We hope to have message to reach in every country in Africa on mitigating climate change in the world.

— Author Olden Hamabibi, Zambia

YALI is a family and YALI is a movement that embodies changemaking and social entrepreneurship. I am YALI. I am Change.

— Chi Mezie, Nigeria

Education is the only equalizer between the poor and the rich. I stand with girls by promoting girl child right to education through my own initiative called Liberty scholarships… My goal is to reach as many as 10,000 girl in the next 5-7 years.

— Liberty Kandulu, Malawi

2017 is going to be an exciting year. There will be more new courses, new resources, and exciting initiatives to help you in your communities. Ultimately, though, the success of the YALI Network is dependent on what each of you chooses to do with your knowledge, opportunity, and passion, and we can't wait to see the difference you will make in the new year! What will your pledge be to help your community in 2017?

More than just words: Why constitutions need to include human rights

If human rights are supposed to be the rights everyone has — like free expression, equal protection and the freedom of conscience — why do they need to be codified in a country's constitution? And where do your rights stand if you live in a country where the constitution is not always respected?

Paul Graham, a project director for southern Africa at the nongovernmental watchdog organization Freedom House, said it is not only important for constitutions to spell out the standard rights that everyone enjoys, but it is also important for citizens to be aware of them to better understand when their rights are being violated.

"How do you play the game when you don't even know the rule book?" Graham asked. He likened the question to a sporting match.

(U.S. Dept. of Justice)

“You might quarrel about the rules. You might yell about that goal and whether it should have been awarded or not, but without the rule book you’re not even sure you’re playing the same game,” he said.

It is very important to spell out what the rules are when it comes to human rights. “While they may not stop someone from having their rights abused, at least that person has some recourse. Whereas if there is no codification, it’s very difficult because then they must appeal to international norms, which are under threat and to which many people are quite prejudiced,” Graham said.

Graham outlined several considerations that affect a constitution’s ability to uphold human rights:

- Are domestic laws in line with the constitution? If not, you have a situation where your rights may be guaranteed on paper, but you may have to go to court every time to defend them.
- Does the constitution also establish and safeguard institutions to guarantee rights? Civil society groups can raise awareness and pressure, but their power may be limited if they are not protected and able to operate according to the law.
- Are courts capable of adjudicating rights and ensuring that their decisions are implemented? More to the point: Is the judiciary dependent on the executive branch or is it independent?
- How well educated are citizens about their rights and what their constitution is supposed to protect? Does their country’s educational system provide this information? Are most people literate enough to read the laws, and is the constitution readily available?
- Are nonstate actors such as criminal groups, armed factions or powerful business interests undermining the constitution or using it to gain an unfair advantage?
- Is there support for the country’s constitution and democratic development from its neighbors? Along with the risk of formal and informal interference, there is also the risk of instability when neighboring states are willing to displace their own people.

The original U.S. Constitution did not contain human rights provisions, since some feared that articulating rights could limit them. But subsequent amendments to it have become the primary legal foundations that have been used by African Americans, women’s suffragists, LGBTI activists and others to assert their human rights. When South Africa wrote its post-apartheid constitution, human rights were incorporated into the document.

“In the long run, you’ve got to embed some sort of constitutional dispensation to assist you” to protect human rights, Graham said. “Otherwise, every fight is costly to you as an individual and often without precedent.”

Speaking Out Against Bias Promotes

Human Rights (Part 2)

Recently, we shared tips for responding to prejudiced comments or jokes you might hear among your family and friends. (Check out Part 1 if you missed it!) It's also possible that you will witness bias in more public places, like your school, work, or neighborhood. Even among people you may not know as well as your friends and family, it is important to let people know when their words are hurtful or offensive, and to create a welcoming environment for everyone. The following tips, from Love Has No Labels, provide ideas on how to respond in these potentially tricky situations.

At School

Determine the extent of the problem.

As a social science or club activity, survey the people around you about biased language at school: what they hear most often, who they hear it from, how it makes them feel and what they're willing to do about it.

Start a "Words Hurt" campaign.

Get students, teachers, counselors and administrators to sponsor an assembly, or a weeklong or yearlong education campaign, about the damaging effect of hurtful words.

Support student mediators — and use peer pressure.

Train students in conflict resolution techniques, and ask them to work with peers to marginalize the use of biased language.

At Work

Interrupt early.

Workplace culture largely is determined by what is or isn't allowed to occur. If people are slow to respond to bigotry, bigotry prevails. Speak up early and often in order to build a more inclusive environment.

Go up the ladder.

If behavior persists, take your complaints up the management ladder. Find allies in upper management, and call on them to help create and maintain an office environment free of bias and bigotry.

Don't laugh.

Meet a bigoted "joke" with silence, and maybe a raised eyebrow. Use body language to communicate your distaste for bigoted "humor."

In Your Neighborhood

Model neighborly behavior.

Extend a hearty welcome to new neighbors, and honor old neighbors. Help to create a neighborhood that values connectedness, rather than exclusion and bias.

Apologize immediately.

If you make a joke in poor taste, correct your mistake on the spot: “I’m really sorry. I don’t know what I was thinking. I could make some excuses, but none would make up for telling such a tasteless joke. I hope you accept my apology.”

It can be uncomfortable to speak up in a professional setting or in response to someone you don’t know very well. However, it is important as it helps create a welcoming, safe environment throughout the community. Practicing possible responses in advance can help you feel more comfortable when the situation arises!

Stay tuned to the YALI Network to find out how to participate in our upcoming human rights course. Earn your certificate and share your stories of what you are doing to promote inclusiveness and speak out against bias. Learn more and get involved at yali.state.gov/4all.

The above tips have been reprinted with permission from Love Has No Labels. Check out their website for more tips!

Pick your issue, choose your country. Verified human rights data is at your fingertips.

What’s the best way to get extensive, credible information about human rights?

The U.S. Department of State’s *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* are “by far the most-read U.S. government document abroad,” said Deputy Assistant Secretary Michael Kozak, who works in the State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) — the office which compiles them annually.

The reports are required by U.S. law so officials in Congress and the administration have a full appreciation of human rights conditions in countries as they consider matters such as providing security and development assistance, trade deals and other bilateral ties. Human rights officers in U.S. embassies keep in contact with local civil society organizations to help compile the data.

(Shutterstock)

Kozak said officials from other countries also consult the reports. For example, if someone seeks to

enter a country claiming status as a refugee, “their immigration officers, as are ours, are looking at the report and … [checking if] the country conditions this person is describing are backed up by what’s in the report,” he said.

Steven Feldstein, a deputy assistant secretary for DRL who monitors African countries, said the reports are also useful for individuals seeking information either about the situation in a particular country or about specific issues such as freedom of speech, prison conditions or LGBTI rights in a variety of places. Using the “Build a Report” function, people can get the specific data they need without having to plow through the full document, which totals tens of thousands of pages.

Because the reports reflect the consensus of the U.S. government, they also provide a high level of credibility that helps a human rights activist or journalist who is making inquiries about human rights concerns.

“That not only takes away the onus and burden from that journalist, but it also forces a conversation that governments have a hard time ducking away from,” Feldstein said.

What issues are you most concerned with? Are human rights improving or declining in your country? Use the online reports as a research tool to study the trends.

Speaking Out Against Bias Promotes Human Rights (Part 1)

Bias and prejudice, whether based on ethnic group, physical abilities, or other characteristics, can show up in many situations. Many biases are hidden, and it’s important for each of us to examine our own thoughts and reactions and strive not to act in a prejudicial manner. Equally important, however, is to speak out against prejudice that we hear in everyday life. Whether this prejudice takes the form of jokes targeted at specific minority groups or unfair assumptions about people based on their physical traits, these moments present an opportunity to speak out and encourage our communities to become more accepting.

The following tips, from Love Has No Labels, provide ideas on how to respond to bias among your family and friends.

With Family

Anticipate and rehearse.

When you know bias is likely to arise, practice possible responses in front of a mirror beforehand. Figure out what works best for you and what feels the most comfortable. Become confident in your responses, and use them.

Discuss actively.

Ask clarifying questions when someone says something that seems biased. “Why do you feel that way?” “Are you saying everyone should feel this way?” Articulate your view: “You know, Dad, I see this differently. Here’s why.” Strive for common ground: “What can we agree on here?”

Describe what is happening.

Define the offense, and describe the pattern of behavior. “Every time I come over, you tell jokes that I find offensive. While some people might laugh along with you, I don’t. I’ve asked you not to tell them, but you keep doing it anyway.”

With Friends

Approach friends as allies.

When a friend makes a hurtful comment or poses an offensive question, it’s easy to shut down, put up walls or disengage. Remember that you’re friends with this person for a reason; something special brought you together. Drawing on that bond, explain how the comment offended you.

Respond with silence.

When a friend poses a question or makes a statement that feels hurtful, let protracted silence do the work for you. Don’t say anything and wait for the speaker to respond with an open-ended question: “What’s up?” Then describe the comment from your point of view.

Talk about differences.

When we have friendships across group lines, it’s natural to focus on what we have in common, rather than our differences. Yet our differences matter. Strive to open up the conversation: “We’ve been friends for years, and I value our friendship very much. One thing we’ve never really talked about is my experiences with racism. I’d like to do that now.”

Many people do not realize when their comments are biased or offensive, which means there are opportunities for educating them. Think about which of these tips might be applicable in your own life, and take action the next time there is an opportunity to speak up against bias in your community!
Stay tuned to the YALI Network to find out how to participate in our upcoming human rights course. Earn your certificate and share your stories of what you are doing to promote inclusiveness and speak out against bias! Learn more and get involved at yali.state.gov/4all.

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Country of the Week: Nigeria's featured YALI Network members

This we have been highlighting members from Nigeria, the YALI Network #CountryoftheWeek!

With the largest concentration of YALI Network members, it was a challenge to choose from the many inspiring stories we received from outstanding Nigerian leaders. The three Network members profiled here were chosen because of the remarkable way they've used what the Network has taught them to tackle gender-based discrimination, help underprivileged youth get jobs, teach others to become better leaders, and more. Their efforts are representative of the great work done by Nigeria's YALI Network!

Read on:

Oluwafisayo Ajisola

(State Dept.)

Oluwafisayo Ajisola, of Ogba, joined the YALI Network in December 2015, but she's been making a difference in her community for years.

The Jewel Empowerment Foundation, which Oluwafisayo founded in 2011, has had a positive impact on the lives of over two thousand young people by "visiting and celebrating children at juvenile homes and orphanages" and "caring for kids on the street." It provides food, back-to-school materials, toiletries, and other basic needs that "build the self-esteem of underprivileged children," she says.

The Foundation also organizes annual Youth Empowerment Seminars, Oluwafisayo says, with "amazing themes that cut across leadership, self-discovery, successful habits, entrepreneurship and many more… We've had great speakers across the globe."

In her year as a YALI Network member, Oluwafisayo says, "I can boldly say I have gained a lot from the online courses and the face2face YALI group on Facebook." For her, the courses are about more than just passing a quiz and getting a certificate. "It's about learning something different that would yield significant results in my everyday activities," she says. "The courses practically trigger something inside of me; I just tell myself: 'This is for me and I have to act.'"

And that's exactly what she's doing. In May, she helped organize an #Africa4Her event on "Understanding the Rights of Women and Girls." Oluwafisayo says, "I was recognized as a champion for fulfilling my pledge and facilitating the event."

Samuel Adewumi

Samuel Adewumi, from Egan, is the founder of Gwise Global Community, a nonprofit dedicated to

campaigning against gender-based “abuses, discrimination, violence, and inequalities.” His organization advocates for women and girls in rural communities through training, empowerment, and “fostering global certifications in entrepreneurship and leadership,” with a focus on birth attendants, health workers, and teachers.

(State Dept.)

Samuel’s work has had an impact on hundreds. Of his organization’s training, which began with a #YALILearns course, he says, “most of our trainee women leaders (over 300) have gone ahead to read and take online courses at their own pace to foster their leadership and entrepreneurship roles.” Many of them have begun training the women they work with on sexual abuse and women’s empowerment, and the program has expanded to three outreach centers. Each center provides delivery kits for pregnant women and offers reporting stations “to train, document, report, and curb all forms of female discrimination, abuses, and violence.”

Benson Benn Udoh

(State Dept.)

Faced with “rising social problems, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and youth restiveness” in his community, Benson Benn Udoh, from Uyo, “was inspired by YALI to form a group in 2015 called Youth Education, Entrepreneurship, and Empowerment Initiative (YEEES).”

Benson describes YEEES as a free program that “empowers youths to live productive lives, by providing them with education incentives, vocational skills training and acquisition, counseling services and small businesses support in rural communities and slums.” It enables them “to be easily absorbed into available local labour markets or support startups.”

“YEEES operates in a simple way,” he says. “We arrange for someone to receive training on a particular vocation. When the apprentice successfully acquires the skills or masters the vocation, he or she trains someone else, [for] free, thus increasing the second person’s chances of employability.”

“Borrowing heavily from YALI’s vision and online resources,” Benson says, “we have made significant progress in terms of providing positive change and human development in our communities.” Indeed, YEEES has grown from 11 to 72 members in 18 months, including new branches in six other communities in the state.

“From inception to date,” Benson says, “YEEES has helped train eight youths as professional drivers, three girls as hairdressers, four heavy machinery operators, and four seamstresses, as well as helped open and support small businesses for six youths.” Another 18 are currently undergoing training “to equip them with bread-winning tools for a self-sustaining future.”

Mandela Washington Fellow: Striving for a more perfect democracy

Mandela Fellows from Mali (left) and Senegal display their countries flags while waiting for the Town Hall to begin at the Washington Mandela Fellowship Presidential Summit, August 3, 2016. (State Dept./Tim Brown)

Democracy is fragile. Individuals can easily take advantage of the power entrusted to them by the citizenry. According to Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2015 report, democracy faces more threats now than in the last 25 years. As a steward of justice, it is your duty to identify these threats to democracy and develop solutions that promote freedom and equity.

One Mandela Washington Fellow spent time in the United States identifying these threats and formulating recommendations to solve the problems that plague democracies across Africa.*

The five issues identified as contributing to the dismantling of democracy were tribalism, the harassment of opposition parties, youth violence, limitations on freedom of speech and flawed constitutions.

Tribalism

Tribal speech is often used to divide a population. Nations are composed of many groups of people who identify according to their tribe, race or religion. The strong feeling of loyalty to one tribe or group instead of the nation as a whole prevents productivity. Closed-mindedness to those not of one's tribe or group does not promote the ideals of a democracy.

Opposing Parties

Political parties do not uphold the values of democracy when they either encourage or fail to condemn hate and tribal speech. Members of opposing parties should respect each other and their right to hold different visions of good governance. The losing parties must learn to accept defeat for the purpose of maintaining stability and peace. The political elite set an example for the rest of the country.

Youth Violence

The violent tendencies exhibited by disillusioned youth do not bring about positive change. Aggression will not solve the economic and social strife felt by young Africans; instead, the government should work with the population to develop a program of youth empowerment. The government must address the social, economic and political woes facing the population, especially the youth. Improving these conditions will deter youth violence and bring greater stability to a country.

Freedom of Speech

For a democracy to survive, a country's constitution must protect freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Without the media checking the government, the political elite can abuse their power at the expense of the population. Free electronic, print, and social media create an environment for constructive political competition.

A Constitution That Protects All

A constitution should withstand the tests of time and hold both the leaders and the populace accountable for their actions. The constitution should outline the powers bestowed upon each branch of government, basic human rights, protected freedoms including the freedom of speech, and free and fair elections.

Checks and balances should be put in place to ensure the executive office does not amass enough power to elevate itself. The media and branches of government should have the capacity to hold the executive branch accountable for its actions.

International law outlines the basic civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights each person deserves. A country's constitution should promote these same values to ensure each of its citizens enjoys his or her most basic human rights.

Today, democracy faces its biggest threats. In this dire time, it is the population's duty to protect democratic values. Now is the moment to invest in peace and stability for a better tomorrow.

*This Fellow's identity has been concealed for their safety.

Country of the Week: Kenya

A climate change campaign that "breaks the rules" by bringing the discussion to the people through song, dance, and graffiti. A community mapping project that protects residents by empowering them to solve problems and advocate for themselves. A youth mentorship program that teaches high school students to be servant leaders.

What do these initiatives have in common? They were all started by YALI Network members.

Welcome to the first installment of the YALI Country of the Week! Each week, we will showcase one country and some of its outstanding YALI Network members.

This week's Country of the Week is Kenya, and each one of these impressive initiatives was launched by a Kenyan Network member. Read on to learn how the YALI Network helped them change their communities for the better.

Climate Conversations

(Courtesy of Green Sun Cities)

Benedict Muyale calls climate change “the greatest challenge both the poor and the rich face” in the twenty-first century. He sees its effects in Nairobi, witnessing “intense rainfall, flash floods,” and “businesses or kiosks swept away.” But climate change can be difficult, or even boring, to bring up in conversation. “How do we make it interesting?” he wonders. With the help of the YALI Network, Benedict has found a way: art.

Through his organization, Green Sun Cities, Benedict launched a Climate Art campaign that “brings the discussion to the people” through poetry, dance, rap, song, and even graffiti.

After receiving 50 applications from local artists who understood the need to address climate change, Benedict used the YALI Network Online Course *Understanding Climate Change* to train 18 of them to take climate change to the streets at an event in Kariobangi.

“We received overwhelming messages from over 300 locals who attended the event,” Benedict says. “To make sure this awareness stayed at the heart of the community, we painted a graffiti mural on the walls… This awareness is the starting point for taking responsibility to avoid destroying our planet and stealing the future of our children,” he says.

“With such demand for more Climate Art events, we now have a vision to take this discussion to other urban slums in Nairobi, together with the artists.”

Creating Community Champions

(Courtesy of Stephen Githaiga)

“Knowledge is power,” says Stephen Githaiga, also of Nairobi. After taking the *Community Organizing for Action* course, Stephen realized he could bring that power to the people of rural Nyatike.

Stephen used community mapping, which he calls “a process carried out by the community for the community,” to help Nyatike residents identify problems they were facing related to local mining activities and find solutions to address them.

Stephen began by identifying key community members “who would act as champions on mining issues and also represent the whole community.” Then, he worked with these leaders to gather information “on the state of small-scale miners in the area, resources available, their engagement levels with the government, and challenges they encountered.” Through community discussion and feedback, Stephen empowered residents to come up with solutions and rally together in “associations or groups for action.”

The meetings Stephen facilitated were inclusive of “women, men, local administration, clergy, and youth in proportionate measure.” One participant stated, “As a community, we are forever grateful for this knowledge and to other community members so that the whole community benefits. I believe

that in a matter of time, our lives will change for the best."

"Thank you, YALI Network," Stephen says, "for enabling me to impact my community."

Growing Leaders

(Courtesy of Protus Musotsi)

The Servant Leadership: *The Deciding Difference* course "reshaped my thinking and drove me into action," says Protus Musotsi, of Eldoret. He decided to use his new skills to improve society by launching a Youth for Servant Leadership initiative, training and mentoring local high school students to be better leaders.

"The program has been greatly appreciated by school teachers and students," says Protus, a fact that has allowed him to broaden the program's reach and include more young leaders. He has also used materials provided by the YALI Network to train these and other youth on environmental conservation and climate change, carrying out tree planting and solid waste management in their communities.

"I am who I am today because of YALI" and will be a member "for life," he says.

Uganda YALI Network members urged to fight gender inequality and violence in special online chat

Several YALI Network members from Uganda participated in an online chat with Jimmie Briggs, co-founder and executive director emeritus of the Man Up Campaign, as part of their efforts around the #16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

(State Dept.)

Briggs, who is also an instructor for the YALI Network Online Course Understanding the Rights of Women and Girls, told audience members that dialogue, respect and education are key to stopping violence against women and girls.

Briggs noted that one of the most effective ways to open a dialogue with men about abuse against women and girls is "to reach people where they are."

"You have to go to them. Go where men congregate, where they feel safe, speak to them in their language in their spaces using their tools," he said.

When asked how best to address GBV when dealing with traditional or cultural norms such as female genital mutilation, he replied:

“What I’ve learned is to not enter from a place of condescension, but respect. Dialogue works best; find that place of mutual understanding. Discuss choices and alternatives. We see that when people from outside a community come in and condemn practices, dialogue shuts down and you get resentment,” Briggs said.

Instead, “discuss the consequences of such practices and offer alternative solutions. These things take time and change — and it won’t happen overnight. Use credible messengers — people in the community whose opinion and counsel is respected.”

Ultimately, Briggs believes that change comes from within and that people change their own minds. “Transformation is a personal, individual thing,” he told Network members.

He says that those working to stop gender-based violence can help by creating the space for people to transform themselves. “It will last longer.”

You can view the full online chat with Jimmie Briggs on Vimeo here.